



Hoi Polloi

An Anthology of Essays

Volume 3

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"He that writes to himself writes to an eternal public."

~Emerson

Writing is a solitary act, requiring moments of private reflection. Paradoxically, however, if one writes clearly, he or she can communicate a universal theme or truth to a diverse audience. Maintaining the tradition of years past, the 1999 edition of *Hoi Polloi* showcases formal and informal essays written by students at Gainesville College. Each writer has taken his or her individual experience and transformed it into a work that speaks to the *hoi polloi*, or common man.

Congratulations to the writers of the essays in this year's magazine who masterfully shared their unique ideas. Brief biographies of each writer follow the collection of essays. I encourage all students interested in submitting their essays to future issues of *Hoi Polloi* to contact their English professor or the *Hoi Polloi* faculty advisor.

While writing may be a solitary act, producing a literary magazine requires a collaborative effort. I would like to thank Dr. Croft for his insightful comments and suggestions that made my experience as editor both educational and rewarding. His superior style skills and probing questions polished this magazine to a professional shine. Publishing *Hoi Polloi* would not have been possible without the critical eyes of our faculty and student advisory boards. We are also grateful to our contest judge, Lissa Holloway-Attaway of Georgia Tech. Finally, many thanks are due to Heather Blair for expressing her artistic expertise on this year's cover.

Please note that, unless otherwise noted, all citations for quotations in the text refer to *The Bedford Introduction to Literature*, Fourth Edition, edited by Michael Meyer.

In the hopes of inspiring others to reflect privately and record their individual ideas, we present the 1999 edition of *Hoi Polloi*.

Melissa Burns
Editor

Introduction

Medieval Expressions

Horace Howell

Some people are wont to speak what they hear most often. As a result, the languages of our world fluctuate between different eras, such as old English, Chaucer's era of Middle English, and Shakespeare's Elizabethan English. Unfortunately, gestures and figures of speech become lost to the times as they fall out of use. No one nowadays would hear "Hail, and well met!" called to him or her on the street. Nor would someone catch word of a person's injury by an arquebus or a glaive. In the Medieval Period, however, one could use a variety of expressions to signify greetings, leave taking, and weaponry, or to make a general inquiry. Sadly, though, many of these expressions earn archaic labels in modern English dictionaries.

The most susceptible figures of speech to fall out of use are casual or formal hellos, meaningful goodbyes, or expressions of frustration or disappointment. When mounted knights charged to war for their kings, a strict etiquette emerged that dictated proper ways of communicating greetings and one's desires in a gentlemanly fashion. Several of the following examples usually included a heraldic emblem or a lengthy name preceded by a title: "Good day; Good morrow; Fare thee well; God speed; How now?; Welcome, indeed; Farewell; Hear! Hear!; Hold!"; and the simple "Greetings!" Many times the greeting held merely an expression of great or many thanks, such as "grammercy," or "grant mercy." Occasionally, people used exasperatory sayings like "Curses!" and "alas," or "by God, Heavens," or "by Heaven" to precede their lament. Sometimes people included unifying concluding remarks in their farewells such as "so be it" and "very well."

Like greetings and farewells, the inquiry also evolved with changing times. In medieval times a multitude of question-words existed. If someone wanted to demand something of another, he or she generally said "what so" instead of "whatsoever," "whereas" instead of "where," "whereby and wherefore" instead

of "why," and even more common questions for the time such as "wouldst thou, shalt, hast, art, or hath thou been?" One could ask whether a farm's produce was withinforth or withoutforth of the storage silo. If he or she knew the proper protocol of asking local residents, an inquirer could have also gathered whether or not "fair childer are kindred of yon handfast woman." So too could someone pursue the knowledge of an uncouth stranger's name or the "who's who" among sworn brothers (close companions) and afear'd harbingers (the preparers of the Lord's lodgings).

If a curious vacationer to the Dark Ages decided to visit a large town's armory, the unschooled time traveler would be amazed at all of the weapons, and even more so at the extravagant names they possess. Such weapons would include the scimitar, a long subtly curved sword, and the rapier, a thin blade like a foil. Likely, the explorer would also see a halberd, a long pole with an extension of an axe-like blade. The sight of a dirk or a gisarme, a type of battleaxe, would probably not confuse a person who could travel to the era of handheld weapons. Even a scholarly individual might think twice about the sound of a voulge, berdache, ranseur, or claymore.

Overall, an impressive number of medieval expressions, greetings, and farewells have become lost to most people's tongues. We continue to add our modern sayings and ways of relaying our ideas to our system of communication, but who can say what figures of speech, popular today, might die out of conversation forever in the years to come?

The Best Me

Linda Henderson

The question "How will having a college education affect your life?" implies that I expect a change in my life after I graduate from college. In this respect, I am different from most of my classmates. I am in college only to learn. Not a single day has passed since I started college when I have not acquired new information. I do not need a degree to make a living or to improve my lifestyle. I do, however, need the knowledge I am acquiring to build my self-esteem. After years of being a wife, a mommy, and a helpmate, I am ready to reclaim what I gave up years ago in 1964: striving to be the best "me" I can be.

As a teenager, I was pulled between my parents' ideas of what they wanted me to become. My mother married my father when she was nineteen, and she was happy. Without a doubt, she believed I would also marry at nineteen and settle into marital bliss. So, when I was still a young teen, she began teaching me how to embroider and sew. I started a hope chest and eagerly anticipated the day a new-found husband would complete me, or at least head me in the right direction with "Mrs." in front of my name.

My father was the exact opposite of my mother. He forbade me to take any courses in high school other than academic courses. When I tried to sign up for physical education, home economics, or typing, he informed me that I could acquire the same skills by running around the backyard, watching Mother in the kitchen, or banging on a typewriter in our den. Determined that I would obtain a college degree and become an attorney, he often told me that anyone who liked to talk and argue as much as I did should get paid for it.

Torn between my parents' game of tug-of-war over my destiny, I chose the path of least resistance and married at nineteen. My father's only ally, logic, held no weight against love, hormones, and the cute guy Mom had on her side. In 1967 Dad told me, "You will be a damn fool if you do not go to college." Thirty years later, a dear friend repeated Dad's words when I whined about

wanting to attend college, but hesitated because of fear. Finally, I listened to the wise words of the people I respect, and I am glad I did.

Attending college affects my life everyday. Whether I learn Renfield went to Transylvania before Jonathan Harker, or how to solve a complicated mathematical equation, I feel improved, as if I am continuing to grow, rather than fermenting. Within the last six weeks, I have often found myself wanting to grab a few of my classmates, shake some sense into them, and ask, "Why aren't you paying attention? Don't you realize the opportunities you have in school? Don't you care?" As I have told my children, knowledge is a treasure which no one can steal. Although a person may temporarily forget minor facts, he or she is still a better person for learning the information. Why didn't I realize the value of an education when I was eighteen?

By attending college, I feel that, even at forty-nine, I still have a future. Six months ago, I agonized over the possibility of enduring the longevity of my 102- and 104-year-old aunts. Now, thanks to college, I realize I can still accomplish any goal I put my mind to. I feel twenty years younger just by watching the teenagers trying to juggle their jobs, love-lives, and studies. I do not envy them. I have already taken my trip down the paths they now tread, and I can admit that I have taken my share of wrong turns. Teenagers may have youth on their side, but I have maturity and experience standing beside me. Six months ago competing with them scared me, but now, look out--I'm coming through!

In twenty years, I may be an attorney or a politician, or I may still be a wife, mother, and helpmate. I have spent twenty-seven years birthing, nursing, and carpooling for my kids, and twenty-five years managing property for my husband and myself. I love my children and my husband, and I don't resent the time I've spent with them. They know I will always be there for them. Right now, however, I feel blessed because no one really needs me.

Thus, college has provided the perfect opportunity to improve myself. By attending college, I have a second chance to continue to grow into the best adult I can be. I am not going through my second childhood; I am just trying to finish my first one. The other students may be smarter, most of them are younger and better looking, but I do not think anyone on campus is happier than I am just to be in college.

The Process of Elimination

Joyce Lyell

Faxes, e-mail, check debit cards, and many other modern methods of sending and processing information have made life easier for many people. For quick access to information, what could be faster than going on-line on the Internet? Just because something is quick and easy, however, does that make it better? Changes in computer technology, uncertainty about the changes that may develop in the future, and the impact these changes may have on financial security cause anxiety for many students.

One cause of anxiety for students is the change in computer technology. Many students recall their excitement when they learned that their workplaces were finally switching from manual to computer processed information. Since computers were going to be available to everyone in the office, students felt less pressure because they were going to be able to complete their job assignments easier and faster. As offices began to run more efficiently, students breathed a sigh of relief. Then, in almost no time, many people were being replaced by computers. The speed and accuracy of the computers led to increased efficiency, but they also resulted in a reduction of the number of people companies needed to employ. In addition to the jobs that were lost because of computer technology, many who were lucky enough to remain employed saw their workload increase as they now had to take over the job duties of the people who had been fired. The few remaining workers wondered if their jobs were ever going to be secure.

Consequently, many students face the additional anxiety of not knowing how future technological advances may change their lives. By the time they graduate, will their skills still be in demand? If so, how many other students will be trying to land the same position that they are applying for? The increased competition for high-wage jobs causes anxiety for most students. They are concerned that, as more and more students graduate, the demand for their services will decline and eventually, as the demand declines, so will the pay scale. With

improvements in technology, will their jobs one day become low-skill jobs? In addition, students don't feel very confident about their chances of getting promoted because of the improvements made in computer technology. Due to increased computer efficiency, downsizing in many companies has erased the middle management positions that were once available. Some students fear that, once hired, they will be stuck in the same position with no chance of advancement. Most students want to have upward mobility, but they are afraid that the only mobility for them may be from one company to another.

Because they have seen many changes in technology and don't know what new technology may be developed in the future, most students are very confused about their financial security. If technology continues to advance rapidly, will they eventually be faced with the decision of whether or not to return to school again? Since most students are working to help pay for the cost of their education, and many are responsible for paying the total cost of their education, they worry about debt accumulation. Those receiving student loans worry because they will have to pay back the loans after graduating and can't predict their future salaries. The thought that they may possibly have to earn two or even three degrees in their lifetimes to be able to achieve success petrifies them. They want to obtain success, but they don't know what that success will cost them in the long run.

With the many improvements in their lives, students are excited to be on the cutting edge of technology. But not knowing exactly how this new technology will ultimately impact them in the future leaves many students uncertain. They can only hope that they won't end up on the wrong side of that cutting edge, an edge that may, sooner or later, cut them out of the picture entirely.

The World at My Fingertips

Chante Wilson

"Computers used to be a luxury. Now they are a necessity," said David Parks, MIS manager at Caradon Indalex, the company where I work. And the changes don't stop there. Computers have made specific areas of my life as easy as one, two, three.

Computers have dramatically increased the speed of communication in my life. For example, I can e-mail messages to anyone, anywhere in the world, quickly and easily. When I want to talk to a friend of mine in Illinois, I send him an e-mail message. The speed and convenience of e-mail also save me from having a massive phone bill. Rather than fax or mail documents to a customer, my company now sends most information via e-mail. As a result of having laptop computers, salesmen can transmit information directly to a customer in a matter of seconds. Prior to the convenience of laptop computers, our salesmen would call the office, ask for an inside representative, ask their questions, and wait while the inside representative looked up the information on his or her computer. Tax forms are another example. These documents can now be filed electronically with the Internal Revenue Service. Last week, my accountant filed my taxes in fifteen minutes. We looked over the return to make sure it was accurate and with the press of a button--POOF! The return was in the hands of a willing and capable IRS employee. Such quick and accurate communication is what businesses desire and achieve by using computers.

Furthermore, I can access almost any kind of information I need or want with a computer. Now computers can even talk. The possession of this human quality provides me with the convenience of checking my account balance after bank hours. I key in my personal identification number; then the voice at the other end of the telephone gives me my account balance. Another way to access information from computers is via the Internet. A friend and I visited Illinois over Christmas to move her furniture to Georgia. When her friend was unable to drive

us back home, we used the Internet to access information about flights from Chicago to Atlanta. We looked up departure times, arrival times, and prices. In today's fast-paced world, easy access to information seems to be on everyone's priority list.

In addition to quick communication and easy access to information, computers help me perform my job more efficiently. Space-consuming Rolodexes and typewriters have been rendered obsolete by the computer. Without WordPerfect on our computers four years ago, we typed all our letters on a typewriter. Mistakes were a nightmare, especially if I discovered a mistake after removing a completed paper from the typewriter, since aligning the paper with the mistake was nearly impossible. But, by requiring only the touch of a button to erase the error, software packages like WordPerfect and Microsoft have decreased the time needed to correct mistakes. At my job all information regarding orders is now on the computer. If this information were not on the computer, I would spend hours walking through the plant searching for an order. This experience could be very trying, considering that our plant covers about two hundred thousand square feet and that its temperature can reach 110 degrees in the summer. With the convenience of computers, though, I can now access this information in about fifteen seconds. I truly value the improvements computers have made on my job because I am not spending all day correcting mistakes and searching for information.

Clearly then, computers have had a major impact on my life, and all indications point toward even greater effects from more advanced technology in the future. In a year, I could instruct a computer to open my front door. I look forward to the development of a fully computerized car. I would get in my car, tell it where to go, and then sleep the rest of the way. However computers develop, I am sure they will make my life more efficient.

Environmental Awareness

Darrell Jones

In the summer of 1997, concerned environmentalists embarked on a worthwhile endeavor to remove pollutants from Northeast Georgia's numerous creek beds. Unfortunately, their cause, entitled "Creek Clean '97," fell short of the project leaders' expectations when nearly half of the organizers and volunteers failed to show up the day of the cleanup. Disappointed, members of the Environmental Protection Agency and United States Forestry Service led a handful of concerned individuals through the rivers and the creeks of the community, personally removing all types of garbage. They hope that future attempts will attract greater numbers of people committed to effecting positive changes in mountain life diversity. As members of the community with a definite impact on the environment, we need to become better educated in environmental matters, specifically trained in water pollution control, and more committed to keeping our area's water sources clean.

By becoming better educated in environmental concerns, people can develop an appreciation for our natural resources. Charlie McGugan, Superintendent of Water and Wastewater for the City of Clarkesville, Georgia, states that "taking advantage of seminars that cover environmental issues and programs that tackle pollution control problems can effectively help all people in the community." Newspaper and magazine articles provide information about maintaining fresh water streams in a pollution-free environment. Particularly crucial is teaching the next generation to understand our environment's delicate ecosystem. Young people need opportunities to learn more about the importance of natural resources, including water. Parents, teachers, and other community members have the tremendous obligation of educating children about their water resources, which are vital to life. Adults and children alike should share their knowledge of environmental issues and encourage others in their families and communities to become involved in caring for our natural resources.

Just as importantly, people need to become more conscious of limiting water pollution so they can promote and maintain clean water sources. Concerned individuals can promote awareness of environmental issues by teaching others the appropriate means of disposing of motor oil, grease, and other household wastes that wreak havoc on our area's drinking water, lakes, and streams. Recyclers can take motor oil to service stations for recycling, and they can dispose of household grease at the area landfill. In addition to these positive actions, environmental supporters can organize more efforts to clean up streams. Hands-on experience in environmental work enhances everyone's education, thus enabling all of us to more effectively promote a better environment for the future.

Individuals committed to keeping our area's water sources clean are able to make a positive difference in pollution control. When asked to help in a clean-up project, I enthusiastically say "Yes" and take advantage of the opportunity to assist others in their efforts. Posting environmental awareness signs at various places in the community is also an effective way to remind people to maintain good habits, including appropriate garbage disposal and water conservation in the home. It will take a whole-hearted commitment from everyone to make our environment a clean place. We must assert our convictions about the need to preserve our available natural resources and make sincere efforts to practice earth-friendly habits in our daily lives.

As an operator of a Water and Waste Water Reclamation Facility and an advocate for cleaner water resources and environmental protection, I often participate in activities to further my own education in environmental concerns and acquire additional training in water pollution control. I am committed to doing my part to help keep our rivers and streams clean for the basic necessities needed for our daily lives. Because I work so closely with water pollution problems, I do not take our water resources for granted. I truly appreciate the convenience of modern plumbing and the ability to turn on the faucet to wash my hands or get a glass of water. Sharing my knowledge of water resources management with others and training others in ways to better care for our environment are important to me. I hope that my efforts along with those of others, will be enough to secure a cleaner, healthier environment for the earth's future inhabitants.

To Read or Not to Read? Trash Is in Question

Rachel Thomas

Individuals throughout the nation eagerly await the latest news updates. Reporters from *The Star* have confirmed that a baby was recently born with three eyes. Meanwhile, a renowned psychic on *The Jerry Springer Show* promises to reveal all. Everyone still talks about the woman who swallowed a wasp and lived to tell about it on *Hard Copy*. Perhaps the greatest story of the morning was that of the transvestites who described their secret lives on *Geraldo*. Who can forget *The Enquirer's* cover story of the week? Elvis Presley was sighted drinking a slurpee at a convenience store in Mobile, Alabama!

Unfortunately, millions of Americans focus their attention on sources similar to those above to obtain "current" information. Such outrageous subjects are the basis of "trash journalism," which is one genre that has become increasingly popular in today's society. This popularity reflects human nature and its love for both gossip and the absurd that prevail in American culture. The availability and inexpensive cost of such journalism have also helped it gain widespread acceptance. Indeed, many reasons for its popularity can be found; however, Americans must take into consideration the negative image which such journalism imprints upon the culture as a whole.

Gossip is the foundation upon which trash journalism has built its empire. Human nature is partially responsible for encouraging such a process, since gossiping seems to have become one of America's favorite pastimes (ranking right up there with watching baseball and eating apple pie). Regardless of whether gossip is based upon truth or lie, it tends to be consumed by eager ears and spread openly by eager mouths. Overexposed celebrities, such as Michael Jackson and Ivanna Trump, are examples of victims of journalistic gossip. Most Americans have retained at least some information about the marriage between Michael Jackson and Lisa Marie Presley as a result of incessant repetition by the media. While selective pictures and copies were used by tabloid companies and talk show

producers to further enhance the nature of the Jackson/Presley relationship, thousands tuned into their television sets to await the next revelation. Americans may have been clueless about the bombing of a federal building in Oklahoma City, but they were certainly well informed about the intricate details of the lives of Jackson, Presley, and countless other highly publicized celebrities. Even so-called evening "news" shows are guilty of resorting to unethical tactics from time to time. In an exclusive *Prime Time Live* interview with Marla Maples, Diane Sawyer asked irrelevantly, "All right, was it really the best sex you ever had?" For more than fifteen years, American society has been moving away from true informational journalism; individuals today seem to be convinced that lower quality journalism is much more entertaining. Because of an overwhelming thirst to obtain the inside scoop, thousands of Americans turn toward trash journalism each day to keep up on the latest gossip.

Virtually every talk show and tabloid features bizarre subjects. Generally, Americans are fascinated by the absurd. Fascinated by the freak acts at carnivals, individuals flock to gawk at the bearded ladies and the world's strongest men and women. What person would not want to see something as new and unusual as a five-legged dog or a two-headed human? The September 1997 issue of *The Sun* boasts stories on subjects such as a four-year-old motorist, an amazing pizza diet, and an alien invasion of a California zoo. Few believe in their hearts that any of these headlines can actually be true; however, one is provoked to read on in hopes of discovering some small loophole that will bring everything to light. Countless works of trash journalism have simply embellished real occurrences. For example, *The Sun* exaggerated a report of a child who piloted a vehicle into a tree at low-speed into a story of a four-year-old motorist who drove his mother to the hospital emergency room. Likewise, talk shows tend to seek out the most bizarre guests that they can find. For example, one of Jenny Jones' shows focused on tremendously obese babies. Jerry Springer aired a show entitled "Male Transvestites in the Marketplace." Such trash journalism appeals even more to many consumers because it is so readily available. Just about every American has access to a television set. Talk shows dominate the daytime airwaves while prime-time tabloid shows such as *Hard Copy* and *Current Affair* are aired during evening hours. Enticing blurbs during commercial breaks highlight amazing stories, thus drawing the viewer's attention toward the shows. Meanwhile, tabloid magazines maintain easy accessibility because they are relatively inexpensive; most cost just over a dollar.

The popularity of trash journalism says a great deal about American culture as a whole. A portion of society actually relies upon information from talk shows and tabloids as a source of credible news. Certain subjects including sex and violence reoccur time and time again in nearly all forms of trash journalism.

Americans are obviously intrigued by such subjects because they tune into them on a daily basis. Not all of society, however, consists of violent, sex-crazed lunatics, despite what such sleazy journalism might indicate. Yet, even though it does not represent the lives of all Americans, trash journalism does project a rather negative image of this society as a whole.

As one can see, many explanations can be given as to why so many Americans choose to watch controversial talk shows or read irresponsible tabloid magazines. Basic human nature seems to be one factor. Americans find entertainment in gossip and absurdities, two elements that are foundations of every "good" piece of trash journalism. Availability and affordability are also contributing factors that entice potential consumers. Even so, the sad fact remains: trash journalism imprints a negative image upon American culture.

Figurative Language Enhances Poetry

Rachel Thomas

Figurative language serves as the foundation for virtually every great work of poetry. Simile and metaphor are two figurative devices used extensively by poets to compare two unlike objects. Such comparisons place emphasis on the concrete, thus enabling readers to form a very clear picture of the image that the poet is trying to convey. In her poem "Daddy," Sylvia Plath employs figurative language to convey the poem's meaning. Although Plath wrote the poem in a simplistic structure resembling a nursery rhyme, "Daddy" is actually a very complex piece. Through careful analysis of major similes and metaphors, the reader discovers the poem's deeper meaning.

Plath's poem opens with a metaphor of a shoe that represents Daddy. The persona comments, "You do not do / Any more, black shoe" (1-2). Color imagery leads the reader to associate the color black with darkness and evil; therefore, Daddy is viewed as an iniquitous man from the start. Probing further, one can conclude that if Daddy is a shoe, then the persona is the foot inside of the shoe. As a shoe constricts one's foot, the narrator feels restricted by her father. Many shoes cause extreme discomfort as a result of their incredible restraint; likewise, the persona suffers under her father's restraint. Intimidated by Daddy, she "barely [dares] to breathe or Achoo" in his presence (5). Had the speaker's father not been such a fear-evoking man, she would not be experiencing these unnatural feelings.

Perhaps the most powerful poetic device is Plath's comparison of the persona to a Jew in Nazi Germany and her father to a German officer. Halfway through the poem, the persona makes an astounding revelation stating, "I may be a bit of a Jew" (40). Although she is not literally of Jewish heritage, this statement enables the reader to feel the persona's tremendous pain. Like a Jew, she is the target of feelings of hatred and estrangement from her father, a Nazi. Just as a Jew in this era would feel tortured, trapped, and powerless, the persona

also experiences such feelings in her relationship with Daddy. The majority of the Jewish victims of World War II were starved, and we see that the speaker is likewise starved, not for food, but for affection and acceptance from her father. Halfway through the poem, the persona acknowledges, "I have always been scared of *you* / With your Luftwaffe, your gobbledygoo. / And your neat mustache, / And your Aryan eye, bright blue. / Panzer-man, panzer-man, O You!" (41-45). These lines certainly do not describe the typical father/daughter bond; rather they depict a relationship in which the persona trembles in fear of her father's strength, force, and physical perfection. By comparing herself to a Jew, the narrator skillfully reveals these deep, powerful emotions.

Next Daddy is compared to Satan. Although he has "a cleft in [his] chin instead of [his] foot," he is "no less a devil for that" (53-54). As with the black shoe image, this comparison again associates Daddy with evil. After all, who could be more iniquitous than the devil himself? Like Satan, Daddy is destructive. He exercises unreasonable authority over his daughter, "poor and white" (4). As a child, the persona became the victim of her father's outrage, and memories of her first ten years of life haunt her well into adulthood. She is so distraught by memories of Daddy that she no longer wants to go on living and attempts suicide: "At twenty I tried to die / And get back, back, back to you" (58-59). Line 59, however, indicates that the narrator still feels bonded to her father, despite her overwhelming feelings of hatred and anger. As is the case with most people, she is simultaneously yet paradoxically attracted to and repelled by evil's intense power. It is Daddy who is ultimately responsible for the young girl's distress, and the malevolent man nearly leads his daughter to a premature death.

In a final significant comparison, the persona compares her current husband, modeled after the image of Daddy, to a vampire. Again, we find evidence of a surprising bond between the speaker and her father, for she instinctively marries a man exactly like her callous father. The persona coldly recalls, "The vampire who said he was you / . . . drank my blood for . . . / Seven years" (72-74). As a vampire sucks the blood from the body of a beautiful young woman, the husband gradually drains vitality from the persona. Following Daddy's example, the husband becomes associated with iniquity. In fact, the reader will note another allusion to darkness, for vampires only venture out after dusk. Based upon this interpretation of the poem, it appears that Daddy, the husband, and evil are synonymous. Together, the three forces nearly lead to the destruction of the persona.

By the conclusion of the poem, it seems that the speaker has come to a certain understanding. Looking down upon her father's grave, she yells, "They always *knew* it was you. / Daddy, daddy, you bastard, I'm through" (79-80). Some critics interpret the last line of the poem as a successful attempt at suicide,

an end to it all. Another interpretation, somewhat more favorable, seems to be supported more completely throughout the piece. Because the narrator has kept these powerful emotions within for so many years, they have nearly succeeded in ruining her life. Without first coming to terms with her memories, she cannot suppress them. Like a flame, her emotions seem to intensify until they burn out when finally unleashed. Although the speaker appears somewhat schizophrenic throughout much of the work, she has regained a sense of the rational by the end of the poem. She feels a sense of relief at having released all of this built-up anger. The persona is "through" with this ugly portion of her life (80). No longer in denial, she is finally able to put her childhood horrors behind her and move ahead. The narrator of this piece has experienced a great deal of pain, yet she is at last able to crush haunting memories and, in turn, move forward, a stronger person.

"Daddy" is a poem which is greatly influenced by prominent comparisons. Similes and metaphors are used to paint a vivid picture of the speaker's father, and the picture that the reader envisions is one of extreme displeasure. In order to gain a complete understanding of the poem, each of its comparisons must be analyzed. As with all poems, figurative language serves as a tool for enhancement, for in this, like all great poetic works, the text is like a puzzle; it must be deciphered piece by piece.

The Ominous Shadow

Melissa Burns

All of us know people whose actions completely perplex us. Reflecting on our knowledge of our friends' characters, we cannot fathom what may elicit specific comments or actions from them. Unknown to us, there may be very elusive causes that produce the mysterious and confusing effects we observe. Such is the case with James Joyce's short story "Eveline," part of his collection of short stories in *The Dubliners*. In this story, told from the third person limited point of view, Joyce employs his common technique of helping the reader "to understand the nature of the substance from its shadow" (Benstock 153). Thus, to comprehend Eveline's perplexing fate, the reader must look to her shadow, or the cause of her madness, her mother. Although physically absent throughout the story, Eveline's mother's shadow exerts a powerful force in determining her daughter's fate.

To understand the maternal domination present in *The Dubliners*, one must examine the historical and social context in which James Joyce wrote. In turn-of-the-century Ireland, economic situations were less than ideal. Men would wait until they were economically secure before marrying a wife; therefore, the average marrying age for men was between the mid-thirties to forties. Experiencing tension from the Irish Church and pressure from the poor economy, men felt severely repressed. Often men released their repressed tension on the women around them. Since most men and women regarded marriage as a bargain in which the men would receive money and property, and the women security, there often wasn't a strong intimate bond between husband and wife. Because of the lack of affection in their marriages, women ended up channeling extra attention to their children. As Mary F. Keating notes, "Often denied the protection, affection, and tenderness of marital love, [the mother] placates herself with a stranglehold on her children" (qtd. in Walzl 46).

In *Dubliners*, James Joyce illustrates this common "stranglehold" by portraying mothers in the short stories who "use their daughters to vent their own frustrations through them" (Walzl 46). In "Eveline," as the protagonist agonizes over her decision to leave her home country, many recollections of her mother and family torment her. The frequency and intensity of these haunting memories represent the extent to which her family maintains a hold over her final fate.

With such strong influences over their daughters, mothers effectively create a vicious cycle, whereby they "manipulate their daughters [so] that, in effect, the young women relive their mother's lives" (Walzl 47). Motivating Eveline's fatal circle is the promise she makes to her mother on her deathbed, a "promise to keep the home together as long as she could" (Joyce 40). Keeping the home together is precisely the sacrifice Eveline has made thus far by caring for the "two young children who had been left to her charge," giving up her "entire wages--seven shillings" (38), and doing all the marketing. The obligations of the family and required self-sacrifices weigh heavily on Eveline as they did her mother, and thus influence her final decision regarding her fiancé Frank: "Eveline, conditioned by her mother's sense of duty, . . . and haunted by a deathbed promise to her mother . . . chooses a death-in-life, rejection of the man who loves her and can offer her a new life" (Walzl 48). The obligations and promises invading her choice to live cause Eveline to break down and thus continue the vicious mother-daughter cycle. As she stands on the dock preparing to depart for her new life and freedom in South America, Eveline's impending madness begins to overwhelm her like a sudden wave, and she suddenly thinks of Frank, her agent of freedom, as her agent of death: "He was drawing her into [the seas]: he would drown her" (Joyce 41). Hence, Eveline "make[s] a life choice that ensure[s] [her] repetition of [her] mother's li[fe]" (Walzl 48). Visualizing marriage with Frank, Eveline assumes that it will resemble her mother's marriage to her father, although Frank differs greatly from her father. She then makes her choice, thereby repeating her mother's mistake as she "set her white face to him, passive, like a helpless animal. Her eyes gave him no sign of love or farewell or recognition" (Joyce 41). In her decision, Eveline has "misplaced the object of her fear, withdrawing from Frank as though he would destroy her, and choosing instead destruction at the hands of her tyrannical father" (Brandabur 64).

Underscoring Eveline's destructive cycle, symbols reflecting the maternal shadow abound in "Eveline." The "coloured print of Margaret Mary Alacoque" (Joyce 37) adorning the Hills' living room symbolizes the self-sacrifice that drives both Eveline and her mother to madness. According to C.H. Peake in his book, *James Joyce: The Citizen and the Author*, Saint Margaret Mary tortured herself until paralyzed and gave over her life to self-mortification (22). Just as Evvy's mother tortures herself with her "commonplace sacrifices" (Joyce 40) and dies in

craziness, so Evvy repeats the same mistake later in her life, thereby mirroring Saint Margaret Mary's self-torture. Likewise, the picture of the saint symbolizes Mrs. Hill's and her daughter's doom, as do the ominous words Mrs. Hill cries out in her final days: "Derevaun Seraun! Derevaun Seraun!" (Joyce 40). According to the late Professor Roland Smith, the corrupt Gaelic phrase means, "the end of the song is raving madness" (Brandabur 62). Symbolic of Frank's song to Eveline about "the lass that loves the sailor" (Joyce 39), the Gaelic words called out in mad anguish portend the final madness that claims Evvy after she leaves Frank. Hence, like her mother, Evvy's life ends in madness.

Just as symbolism illuminates this cycle, so too does Joyce's writing style. The story opens with Eveline gazing out her window with the "odour of dusty cretonne" (Joyce 37) invading her nostrils as she reflects on her past and future. She repeats the same phrase later in the story when her time is running out, but she still remains at the window side, "inhaling the odour of dusty cretonne" (39). The repetition of this phrase represents a metaphor not only "to underline her motionlessness" (Peake 21), but also to illustrate the complete fatal circle her life follows.

Therefore, the reader can clearly observe the weight of Mrs. Hill's shadow, a presence that results in her daughter's debilitating madness. By observing the historical and social forces influencing Joyce's writing, we can understand the underpinnings of maternal domination. Analyzing the mother-daughter cycle in "Eveline" illustrates one way domination manifested itself in Irish society. Furthermore, an examination of the symbols of Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque and the words "Derevaun Seraun!" provides a clearer understanding of the domination. Thus, with the shadow fully illuminated, the reader understands Eveline's final turn to madness.

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O'Connor's Colors

Lea Bennette

Growing up Catholic in the predominantly Protestant Deep South, Flannery O'Connor had a unique outlook on the people and situations around her. Much of the Catholic religion involves symbolism, a fact reflected in her writing. In particular, O'Connor employs color to reflect the underlying themes and motivations of her characters and stories, especially when those themes and motivations pertain to religion. In the stories "Revelation" and "Good Country People," O'Connor uses blue, purple, and yellow to reveal the events that transform her characters.

The most obvious influence of O'Connor's Catholic upbringing is her use of blue to indicate innocence or even a type of divinity, as blue is the color predominantly worn in images of the Virgin Mary. The first description of Manley Pointer in "Good Country People" portrays him as wearing "a bright blue suit" (O'Connor 373). Anyone familiar with O'Connor's writing would immediately be alerted that this character is the instrument of some sort of epiphany, a Christ figure. In another story, "Revelation," however, the focus on blue is an indicator of status. The little boy is dressed "in a dirty blue romper" (390). Here O'Connor's intent is to indicate that the boy is innocent of his own filthiness, because his parent is failing to keep him clean.

While blue represents innocence, it can also symbolize feigned innocence, as in the description of the interior of Manley Pointer's valise: "It had a pale blue spotted lining and only two Bibles in it" ("Good Country People" 380). Symbolically, the man who appears so saintly in his blue suit has, rather, simply hidden his impurities. These impurities later become evident through Manley's actions towards Hulga. In addition to the pale blue spotted lining, O'Connor employs other colors to symbolize Manley's impurities. Not only does Manley wear "a bright blue suit" (373), but he also wears "yellow socks that were not pulled up far enough" (373). Indicative of Manley's underlying immorality, he can't quite manage to hide his yellow socks, despite the blue suit.

As Manley Pointer demonstrates, yellow symbolizes anything or anyone who is cheap, tawdry, or somehow morally inferior. In "Revelation," O'Connor describes the mother of the child in the waiting room as having "dirty yellow hair" (391) and wearing "a yellow sweater and wine colored slacks" (391). As the woman is responsible for the child's state of disarray, yellow symbolizes the mother's irresponsibility. Then in "Good Country People," O'Connor further employs yellow to increase our understanding of Hulga, as she describes her wearing, "a six-year-old skirt and a yellow sweat shirt" (372).

Although O'Connor uses blue and yellow frequently, her most meaningful descriptive color is purple. In the Catholic church, purple is the color of salvation and rebirth, and so precedes or accompanies all epiphanies in both stories. As Hulga struggles with Manley to try to regain her wooden leg, O'Connor tells us that "her face was almost purple" (381). Hulga is reaching critical mass; she hasn't quite reached her epiphany, but it will happen any moment. The same phenomenon occurs in "Revelation" when Mary Grace listens to her mother criticize her in the doctor's office in front of other waiting patients. In almost identical words, O'Connor describes Mary Grace: "The girl's face was almost purple" (397). With Mary Grace, however, her epiphany differs somewhat from Hulga's. Mary Grace breaks free from the constraints she feels that her mother and society have put on her by throwing the book at Mrs. Turpin and calling the good Christian woman a "warthog from hell" (402). By contrast, in "Good Country People," Hulga realizes through her epiphany that she cannot survive without being emotionally dependent, at least a little, on the people around her.

It is in "Revelation," with Mrs. Turpin's own personal revelation, however, that we see the greatest use of purple and the greatest external evidence of an internal struggle. As Mrs. Turpin nears her moment of epiphany, she looks up the road at a pasture that "was growing a peculiar glassy green and the streak of highway had turned lavender" (402). Indicative of God's presence, this purple highway is the path of the truly righteous. In her vision of the highway, "whole companies of white trash, clean for the first time in their lives, and the bands of black Negroes in their white robes, and battalions of freaks and lunatics" (403) ascend. Soon, the purple highway disappears with the setting sun, leaving "only a purple streak in the sky" (403).

By no means are blue, yellow, and purple the only colors that O'Connor employs. They are, however, the most relevant to her characters' ritualistic baptisms and epiphanies. Just as we may link sights and sounds with events from our past experiences, O'Connor uses color to remind us of our own hypocrisies and divinities. It is up to the reader, then, to determine what is or is not symbolic, and to glean from that symbolism whatever lesson he or she can.

Symbolic Epiphany

Erin Wright

Our society recognizes certain symbols as a means of connecting our thoughts, ideas, and emotions to reality. They cement internal abstraction and elicit feeling through association. In literature, however, the rules of society need not apply in the use of symbolism. Authors can create any symbol they wish, attaching to it any meaning or purpose they desire. Some writers choose to use symbols that can be viewed with predetermined associations. The authors then confirm or deny our biased opinions, forcing us to reassess our original perceptions. Other writers choose to create their own symbols, relying on the strength of the text to display their intended meaning. Through the examination of two short stories, Colette's "The Hand" and Nathaniel Hawthorne's "The Minister's Black Veil," we can grasp the variations and similarities surrounding the use of symbolism in literature.

In "The Hand," Colette creates her own symbol by employing a man's hand to symbolize the animalistic and dominating nature of men. A hand by itself, however, does not necessarily conjure the feeling of male domination. Thus, the story requires an important connection between the hand's literal meaning and its symbolic one. Through the young woman's observations and dynamic reactions to the monstrosity of her husband's hand, she is able to build the necessary bridge from physical object to abstract symbol.

At the beginning of the story, the protagonist, "too happy to sleep" (193), displays a sense of incredible joy, appearing self-assured and very much in love with her husband. We quickly learn, however, to suspect this too perfect reality. She lies awake in bed with her sleeping husband, setting up an immediate separation between the lovers. Through her commentary, we learn that her wedding "had been a little more than a kidnapping" (193), taking place only two weeks prior to the story's opening. We also learn that the girl married the man after knowing him for a mere month; she says very little in regard to his nature,

commenting instead on his handsome appearance and talent for "tennis and rowing" (193). She relates marriage to "adventure" (193) instead of commitment, displaying an incredible sense of immaturity. This immaturity hints at her inexperience with life and explains the shock she feels when she realizes her determined reality.

The true nature of the man sleeping beside her hits her when she examines his hand. The hand lies as if separated from her husband's body. Viewing her spouse's hand independently allows the girl to separate herself from him, enabling her perceptions to form without emotional interference. The first characteristic she notices about the hand is its size, which is "bigger than her whole head" (194). She doesn't begin to fear the hand, however, until it begins to move independently, thus hinting that her fear stems from factors her husband cannot directly control. When the first "electric jolt [runs] through the hand" (194), the young woman responds with shock. She imagines the hand displaying "a vile [and] apelike appearance," and when it continues to move she likens it to an animal "ready for battle" (194). When it then repeatedly squeezes the sheets, she relates its action to "the methodical pleasure of a strangler" (194). Relating her fear directly to her husband's hand, the young woman connects the physical perception of the hand past a simple definition to its more complex symbolic meaning.

After the encounter with her husband's hand, the young woman undergoes a transformation, losing all sense of comfort and joy. When her husband speaks to her, a butter knife in his hand, "she shudders and [feels] her skin crawl on the back of her arms and down her neck" (194). Even though he does nothing to harm her, she still fears him. The symbol in this story serves as an epiphany for the young girl. She sees man's basic nature and his inability to control it. She accepts this reality through submission. Concealing "her fear [and] bravely subdu[ing] herself, . . . beginning her life of duplicity, of resignation, and of a lowly, delicate diplomacy, she lean[s] over and humbly kiss[es] the monstrous hand" (195). A gesture of worship and submission, the kiss seals her fate. Without any prior understanding of the hand's symbolic import, the reader nonetheless can now fully comprehend its meaning. Thus, through an unintended symbol, the woman's epiphany is illustrated and her transformation made complete.

In "The Minister's Black Veil," Hawthorne, by using an intentionally disturbing symbol, creates a character that attempts to force epiphany. The symbol, identified in the title, uses both a color and an object readers regard with set feelings. Mr. Hooper, the minister of the Puritan village, places a black veil over his face and refuses to remove it. The color black, often associated with evil and death, inclines our minds towards darkness. Used in wedding ceremonies, the

veil suggests lifetime commitment. The symbolic meaning associated with this object varies with each character's point of view. The congregation of his church associates the black veil with the affliction of secret sin, causing them to avoid the minister out of fear.

Parson Hooper, however, views his veil quite differently. Before putting on the veil, "Mr. Hooper [has] the reputation of a good preacher, but not an energetic one" (279). The Puritan community, obsessed with sin and evil, responds dramatically to the fear evoked "by the thunders of the Word" (279). Mr. Hooper, however, uses "mild persuasive influences" to "win his people heavenward" (279). His mild nature and easily forgettable sermons gain extreme power when he chooses to wear the veil. Previously unaffected by Mr. Hooper's sermons, the churchgoers begin to see him in a different light. When they first view him wearing the veil, he delivers a sermon referring to "secret sin" (279). He preaches of the "sad mysteries which we hide from our nearest and dearest" and explains how all people conceal sins from their very consciousness, "forgetting that the Omniscient can detect them" (279). In response, the community shudders. The minister affects them deeply for the first time, and they treat him differently. When they hear his sermon, they do not wish to examine their own sinfulness; instead, they relate the sermon directly to the minister and his sins. The congregation ceases to invite him to their homes for meals, regardless of their previous invitations. No longer aspiring "to the honor of walking by their pastor's side," they view him with "strange and bewildered looks" (279) and appear comfortable around him only during funeral ceremonies. He wears the veil but does not discuss it openly, thus adding to its haunting suggestion. Eventually he becomes a stranger in his own community, shunned by everyone including his fiancée.

Despite the community's reaction, the minister remains shrouded in the darkness of his veil, never removing it from his face, not even in private. At the beginning of the story, he appears to wish to teach the congregation the veil's symbolic meaning. Wearing the black veil as "a type and a symbol" (282) of the veil to be worn by all mankind, not in the literal sense but the symbolic one, he believes it to be "a mortal veil . . . not [meant] for eternity" (283). As the minister of the town, Mr. Hooper deems himself responsible for the religious guidance of his parishioners. He wants to teach them about the consequences of hidden sin. Ironically, however, when he wears the veil, he separates himself from the very people he wishes to reach. Unfortunately, incapable of forcing epiphany through symbolism, his attempt at defining truth ruins his life.

When the preacher does not remove his veil or attempt to explain it to the community, he allows the congregation to form their own wild opinions concerning the piece of black crepe. Following his separation from society, he no

longer attempts to integrate himself into life. He allows his future wife to leave him, giving up any chance for worldly happiness with a woman. Although he expresses loneliness and fright when wearing the veil, he does nothing to combat his mortal fears. At the end of his lonely life, the minister dies with his spiritual advisor demanding to know of "the horrible crime upon [his] soul" (285). His last words warn those at his deathbed of the black veil all mankind wears. Asking what makes the "piece of crepe so awful," he dies an angry man, alone and spewing words of sin and loneliness, believing that man never "shows his inmost heart to his friend" (285).

In these two stories, symbolism communicates ideas, and in doing so, creates numerous interpretations for readers. The actions and reactions of the characters, however, define quite clearly their interpretations of the symbols addressed. When examining their responses, we can then address our own. This analysis can heighten our awareness of the constant symbolism that surrounds us in stories, poems, plays, and everyday life.

Fathers and Sons

Lea Bennette

All parents approach parenting differently. Whether or not a mother or father is raising a child correctly is a question that plagues all parents, yet it is only answered with time. In the two plays *Death of a Salesman* by Arthur Miller and *Fences* by August Wilson, we see the common mistake of fathers wanting their sons to be like and yet unlike them in the characters of Willy and Biff Loman and Troy and Cory Maxson.

At the onset of each play, two boys, Biff in *Death of a Salesman* and Cory in *Fences*, have an almost reverent respect for their fathers. In the case of Biff and Willy Loman, this respect takes the form of hero-worship, almost idolatry. Biff receives profuse praise from his father, though often for the wrong sort of behaviors, such as theft of the school football. Willy supports his son's actions by boasting, "Sure he's gotta practice with a regulation ball, doesn't he? Coach'll probably congratulate you on your initiative!" (Miller 1677). Troy and Cory Maxson, however, have a relationship based more on the son's fear of the father than on mutual respect. While both boys would do anything to make their fathers happy with them, Cory asks Troy, "How come you ain't ever liked me?" (Wilson 1890). The question of whether or not Troy likes his son is prompted by Cory's observation that he never receives any sort of praise from his father, despite his doing everything possible to please him, including working at the supermarket and making high marks at school. Troy's approach to parenting is much more of a no-nonsense attitude because he fears instilling any sort of dependence in his son. Rather, he aims to emphasize responsibility and duty over dreams and desires. By contrast, Willy's approach seems to be to cater to dreams and desires to the exclusion of reality.

Reality soon shatters the boys' dreams, however, when their fathers betray them. Biff discovers that his father has been having extramarital affairs, completely dashing all of Biff's beliefs in his father's righteousness and

forthrightness. He subsequently begins to question everything his father has ever taught him as well as the future direction of his life. Biff is lost as he cries, "No, I'm mixed up very bad. Maybe I oughta get married. Maybe I oughta get stuck in something. Maybe that's my trouble" (Miller 1674). Inadvertently, through his unscrupulousness, Willy undermines the very moral foundations he sought to lay.

Acting in what he believes to be his son's best interest, Troy also inadvertently erodes his son's respect and reverence for his way of life. Unable to make headway as a ballplayer himself, Troy refuses to accept sports as a viable option for his son and so denies him the chance, telling him, "You go on to your book-learning so you can work yourself up in that A&P or learn how to fix cars or build houses or something, you get a trade. That way you have something can't nobody take away from you" (Wilson 1890). In denouncing Cory's dreams, Troy destroys whatever respect his son has for him. The theme of parents wanting the son to be different while remaining like the father surfaces as Troy urges Cory to seek a better job than hauling trash, but still in the same genre of subservient labor as a clerk at the grocery store or an auto mechanic.

These disillusionments are, however, the key to the final developments of the father-son relationships. The disillusionment prefaces a violent confrontation between father and son in which the sons declare their independence from their fathers and move on to become something of their own making rather than something of their fathers' making. Biff initiates the confrontation with his father by forcing him to accept the reality of the situation: "Pop! I'm nothing! I'm nothing, Pop. Can't you understand that? There's no spite in it anymore. I'm just what I am, that's all" (Miller 1727). Biff is trying to make his father understand that he is not the Adonis that his father wants him to be and never will be successful in the way his father wants him to be.

Cory's break with his father is much more physically violent, as Troy forces him to be completely independent and make his own way. After taking the bat from Cory and threatening him with it, Troy tells him, "Go on and get away from around my house" (Wilson 1914), forcing Cory to go out and be and do whatever it is that he wants to be and do. Rather than perceiving his father's actions as coming out of love for him and interest in his well-being, though, Cory says, "You ain't never gave me nothing! You ain't never done nothing but hold me back! Afraid I was gonna be better than you. All you ever did was try to make me scared of you" (Wilson 1913). Whereas Biff forces his father to let him go, Troy is the forceful one in this instance.

While Biff never convinces his father to see him for who he is, he succeeds in freeing himself from his father's expectations and fulfills his own dreams. Biff becomes his father's opposite, saying of himself, "I know who I am, kid" (Miller 1730), and of his father, "He never knew who he was" (1730). Cory, however,

has to face the constraints of his economic and political situation and set aside his own dreams to "become someone" by joining the military, a position his father would have looked on proudly, as a means of gaining life skills and maintaining employment. Much to his chagrin, Cory's mother tells him that this is not the case with him: "You just like him. You got [Troy Maxon] in you good" (Wilson 1918).

Though both men raise their children differently, there is no evidence that one way is better than the other. Certainly both sons come to a great deal of grief through the actions of their fathers. But those same actions serve to temper them and show them the roads to becoming the men they are. Cory and Biff are both like and unlike their fathers, each having gained qualities from the men who raised them and having learned from their experiences. Though they may not necessarily have achieved the goals their fathers wished them to, each chooses for himself a life path that suits him.

Romance Novels: Are They Trash?

Katherine McCracken

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In some form, the romance novel has been around for hundreds of years; but the serial, formulaic romances of today have existed only in the last twenty-five years (Carpenter 78). Though the novels themselves have evolved over time, the stigma of being "caught" reading one has stayed much the same throughout the decades. Until recently, the general opinion regarding this branch of fiction has been that romance novels are trash and therefore have no merit whatsoever. Most of society even believes that romance novels are in some cases harmful to the reader, claiming that their content is responsible for women's unrealistic expectations of male behavior and heterosexual relationships. Today, with the extremely wide variety of types of romance, it is impossible to lump all romances in the same category under "trash." Based on the *American Heritage Dictionary's* definition of trash as "cheap or worthless expressions, ideas, etc.," no work of fiction, whether it be mystery, science fiction, western, adventure, or romance, can be called trash because it isn't "worthless." To someone, somewhere, it provides a pleasurable escape from everyday life or an alternative form of entertainment.

Categorized as "formula fiction" (Meyer 20), romance novels are most commonly used as a reprieve from everyday experiences. For example, adventure stories are generally read by men who live pretty ordinary lives doing ordinary jobs. Likewise, romance novels are about beautiful women who fall in love with the men of their dreams, and are read by average women who will themselves out of their familiar existence. One romance reader agrees, "We don't want to read about [men] with beer bellies who come home from work and park themselves in front of the TV. We live with these guys" (qtd. in Carpenter 79). For many years the standard in romance fiction, Harlequin Romances are a relatively harmless form of escape from the stress and strain of women's lives. Juliette Woodruff states, "[An addiction to] a Harlequin heroine is better than a hallucinogenic

heroin" (qtd. in Thompson 438). Most literary critics ridicule romance novels' formulaic or predictable plot lines and their signature happy endings. Ironically, these are the very characteristics that attract women to romances. "We have enough negativism in our lives," observes Chris Peirson, a devoted reader. "When I pick up a novel, I want something more uplifting than most literary fiction" (qtd. in Carpenter 80). Today, the majority of women have careers outside the home in addition to raising families and maintaining successful marital relationships. With these overwhelming demands on their time and energy, more women are turning to the light, happy, although temporary, escape that romance novels provide. Academic Beth Kolko remarks, "Sure it's escapist. But why are women reading romances presumed to be any more idiotic than men watching football?" (qtd. in Carpenter 78). In the end, it's up to each person to decide the best outlet or escape that best fits his or her individual life.

Society's image of the romance reader has not changed a great deal. According to Kelman, "[In today's society] a taste for romances still brands you as subliterate and emotionally frustrated" (59). The novels are ignored by the reviewers and scholars, dismissed for feeding unhealthy fantasies, and for regressing to the "bad old days when a man was supposed to be the only answer to a woman's prayers" (Kelman 60). Reader research has found no basis for the patronizing adjectives used to describe romance readers. Based on research compiled by Harlequin Enterprises, "The typical [romance] reader is in her late 30's to early 40's, college educated, and employed outside the home" (Thompson 443). For example, Marsh Zinberg, the senior editor at Harlequin, is 50, has two children ages 17 and 21, and has been married to the same man since 1970. In addition, she holds an M.A. in English literature from the University of Toronto, where she graduated at the top of her class. Kelman states, "[Zinberg] knows that Harlequin isn't publishing literature for the ages . . . but [is] proud of her work" (60). In a survey of fifty romance readers who all worked full time outside the home, *Romance Writer's Report* found that all but six had some college training, and thirteen held master's degrees or had completed some graduate work. Other researchers have found that regular readers of escape fiction are neither abnormal nor isolated; rather these readers have a high degree of social involvement and social integration (Thompson 443). Jan Hadja concludes that "reading promotes good social relationships and equilibrium no matter how formulaic the text" (qtd. in Thompson 443). As these facts show, the perception of romance readers as a whole is changing slowly but surely.

As a cultural artifact, the formulaic genre of romance fiction has been largely ignored by many scholars, disdained by some for its "mass pop culture appeal," and condemned as a tool of the "patriarchal apparatus" by others (Thompson 437). When romance fiction and readership exploded in the late

1970's and early 1980's, the general consensus was that the reading and writing of romances

embody sexist notions of women's place by focusing on the affective realm, encourage women who read romances to view themselves as powerless, and socialize women into patriarchal norms, thus reinforcing the production of sexist cultural products and perpetuating women's powerlessness. (Thompson 437)

With this critique, society labeled approximately fifty million readers as cultural dupes and mindless sheep. The majority of the criticism of romance as a genre has focused on the books' content. Critics assume that the reader consumes what the author intended, and second, that the reader consumes it in the same way as the critic. This sort of criticism has resulted in the narrow-minded view in which romance novels are seen only as tools to convert their readers into passive recipients of "manipulation by the patriarchal consciousness industry" (Thompson 437).

What these critics forget to consider is the backgrounds, thoughts, ideas, and expectations each individual reader brings with her as she begins to read a novel. According to Marcella Thompson, "Readers bring their own biographies to the texts they consume" (439). A perfect example of this phenomenon is found in the comparison of the cultures of two countries in which numbers of romance readers are high: the United States and India. Researchers have studied the role of Harlequin romance novels in the lives of young, single, middle-class women readers in urban India to judge the extent of the influence on readers' anticipations of romance, sexuality, gender roles, and marital relationships in a society where a majority of marriages are still arranged and most of the aspects of daily living are male dominated. In the United States today, women grow up bombarded by romantic images of what their future relationships will be like. American women take for granted the idea that they will be able to be independent, have their own careers, and be able to choose, for love, whom they will eventually marry.

These backgrounds create different expectations of romance novels. The majority of American women who read romance novels regularly read them for pleasure and entertainment. Indian women, however, come from a vastly different world. Puri states, "For [these] young, middle-class [Indian] women, marriages are not culturally premised on the ideology of romantic love, essential to romance novels" (437). When polled on how they would describe the heroines in romance novels, the Indian women responded with words such as "successful," "independent," "strong," and "feminine." For these readers, independence is the most attractive quality. However, these qualities implicitly or explicitly challenge the socialization of women in India.

On a completely different note, some Indian women are beginning to use romance novels as a supplement to sex education classes taught to teenage girls. While the sex education classes provide clinical anatomized descriptions of sex, romance novels explore a range of relational sex tensions and pleasures within a more romantic framework. One 19-year-old explains, "While sex education classes and [my] older sister helped instruct [me] on sex and the reproductive functions of the body, it was from romance novels that [I] learned that there was nothing wrong with sex; on the contrary, sex was something quite beautiful" (qtd. in Puri 442). Researchers have gathered from this data that among young, single, middle-class Indian women, because of the ideas and expectations they bring to novels, romances have begun to play an important part in the shifting gender roles and changing sexual expectations in their world as opposed to views of the past.

Every year romance novels produce over \$855 million in sales by over 8,000 novelists nationwide and account for nearly half of all mass-market paperback books sold (Cardinal 18). According to Denise of Little Zebra Books in New York City, "Over 1,700 romance titles are published every year, up from 540 in 1980" (qtd. in Carpenter 78). In 1993, Harlequin alone sold more than 200 million books in 25 languages (Thompson 438). The range of choice in romance titles has exploded in the last 25 years. Now readers can choose between an astonishing variety of romance categories in addition to the staple Regency romances, or traditional "bodice rippers" that dominated the market two decades ago. These include mystery romances, Native American romances, second-time-around romances, gothic romances, and steamy romances whose sex scenes "could make Hugh Hefner blush" (Kelman 59). Furthermore, readers are now able to choose just how explicit they want their books to be. On different levels of explicitness, Carpenter elaborates:

About one fifth end with a rapturous kiss in the marital bed. Known in the trade as "sweet" romances, these are easy to spot by their pastel covers. The middle-of-the roaders are termed as "sensual." Between their covers, the hero and heroine engage in lots of mutually satisfying sex described in at least somewhat euphemistic terms. [For example] in Linda Lael Miller's *Memory's Embrace*, the happy romancers "reached the heights at the same time. Steel was sheathed in rippling velvet, the essence of one was blended with that of the other." The real eye-poppers are the spicy "titles" . . . [where] almost anything goes as long as it's consensual and occurs within the context of an increasingly committed relationship . . . [including] elaborate sexual games . . . [and even] bondage and whippings, [etc.]. (80)

However, the popularity of the books only partly accounts for the newfound respect of romance readers and writers. Long attacked by feminists as "mind candy for oppressed housewives" (Carpenter 78), the books are now being hailed as happily and unapologetically subversive by a growing group of women scholars. Between their cover is a universe that is "by women, for women," says Susan Aylworth, a lecturer in English literature at California State University (qtd. in Carpenter 78). Today many romance books take on a host of gritty issues important to women, from alcoholism to rape to abortion to illiteracy. These subjects are usually tackled by authors who have left romance houses to wing it on their own, or because they found the romance houses' rules too strict. These authors, commonly known as mainstream writers, are popular enough to survive on their own and look down on the "trashy bodice rippers." Jayne Ann Currents, also known by her pen name Amanda Quick, considers these novels "the lower end of the publishing spectrum" and declares, "[I] hate 'em. Every mainstream author does" (qtd. in A.J. 68). The integration of major social issues into romance novels and the growing popularity of "women's fiction" as a whole are finally altering society's outlook on both romance readers and writers, making society admit that romance novels might have merit after all.

It is counterproductive to assume that readers of romance do not possess a framework that at once allows them to combine an objective understanding of their own position in relation to men with a subjective acknowledgment of their practice of reading. No form of literature, no matter how formulaic, can be considered worthless or "trash" as long as it serves a purpose to at least one reader. Women may read romance for compensatory reasons, to empower, as with Indian women, or for sheer relaxation. They may write romances for creativity, income, or any multitude of reasons anyone chooses to write. It must be their interpretation, their choice. Like the readers themselves, society must take good novels with the bad. Nonetheless, "sociologists cannot say that the reasons women give for reading romances are really a defense mechanism against persistent and nagging feelings of inadequacy and lack of self-worth, which are themselves the product of consistent subordination and domination" (Thompson 443). If this were the case, critics would be labeling women mindless pawns in an elaborate marketing game. There is no reason why women should be denied the pleasure they derive from reading romances simply because of society's narrow-minded view of this developing genre.

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